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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixty-third session

Summary record of the 1377th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 17 February 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Hayashi

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Iceland (CEDAW/C/ISL/7-8; CEDAW/C/ISL/Q/7-8 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Iceland took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland), introducing the seventh and eighth periodic reports of Iceland (CEDAW/C/ISL/7-8), said that Iceland had been hit hard by the international financial crisis but economic activity was steadily returning to its pre-crisis level. A welfare system that supported a high degree of participation in the labour market, coupled with occupations requiring a large workforce, had created conditions for high rates of employment for women and men. In fact, women's participation in the workforce was the highest in the Western world and Iceland had topped the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum for the seventh year in a row.

3. However, horizontal gender segregation persisted, as was evident in the care and education sectors, where women constituted the vast majority, while men continued to take up traditional occupations in industry, technology and manufacturing. Furthermore, there was a high level of vertical gender segregation, which was reflected in the fact that men held positions of power more often than women. Because of those divides, the economic crisis had led to higher unemployment for men while the rate of employment among women had continued to increase. The gender pay gap had also been reduced and was continuing to narrow.

4. Women's political representation had risen to the highest level in the country's history, with women representing 28 out of the 63 members of parliament. Furthermore, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage, the parliament had established the Icelandic Equality Fund in order to support projects to enhance gender equality, which would receive ISK 100 million per year for the period 2016-2020.

5. In the years since the Committee's previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/ISL/CO/6), the Government had made extensive amendments to the human rights provisions of the Constitution, most notably to the principle of equality set forth in article 65, to ensure that men and women had equal rights in every respect. Moreover, an explanatory note on the bill amending the Constitution had made clear reference to international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as guiding principles on the interpretation of the Constitution. Before an international human rights treaty was ratified, the Government ensured that the national law was adapted to meet the requirements under the treaty in question. Therefore, the courts referred to the relevant national legislation and not directly to the international instruments as such.

6. The Gender Equality Act of 2008, which included a 40 per cent gender quota for government committees and a ban on pay secrecy, had recently been amended in order to bring it more closely into line with a number of European Council gender equality directives on such issues as direct and indirect discrimination and sexual harassment. For example, in 2015, an amendment had been made to the Act to give effect to the Council Directive on the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services.

7. A biennial Gender Equality Forum had been held in November 2015 to coincide with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and had focused on the sexualization of women in the media and gender-based hate speech. The Forum would also be providing input for the new gender equality action plan due to be submitted to the parliament some time in 2016.

8. The cap on the monthly payments to parents under the Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Act of 2000 had been significantly reduced as a result of the economic crisis. As a consequence of the ensuing budget cuts, men had become less likely than women to avail themselves of parental leave. A committee had been established to explore ways of restoring the Act's principal objective of promoting joint parental leave and was due to present its findings towards the end of 2016.

9. Efforts to combat gender-based violence and change societal attitudes were ongoing and included the signing of a joint declaration by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on collaboration to fight violence and its damaging consequences. The police had new powers to remove perpetrators of domestic violence from the home and issue restraining orders, and a project called "Keeping the Window Open" had enabled cross-sectoral cooperation between the police and social services. The project aimed to improve the first response of the police and the quality of investigations, prevent recidivism and provide better support to victims and perpetrators. A bill on ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was also in the pipeline along with proposals to amend the General Penal Code to include a special provision on domestic violence.

10. A plan of action on human trafficking had been carried out in the period 2013-2016 with an emphasis on awareness-raising to help identify victims of trafficking. A new national prosecution authority had been introduced that would be in charge of the prosecution of cases in district courts, including cases involving sexual offences. That meant that decisions to drop cases or discontinue prosecution could be appealed against to the Directorate of Public Prosecutions. A consultative process had been initiated in 2010 by the Minister of the Interior on the handling of and legal framework for rape cases, which had resulted in two reports, in 2013 and 2015, that had found that 98 per cent of victims were women or girls and that 40 per cent were under 18 and had shown that there was room for improvement in handling such cases. A committee of the Ministry had been set up to consider the proposals put forward in those reports.

11. Several projects had been initiated to promote gender equality in education, science and culture, including a project to increase the participation of girls in student government and other social activities in their schools. Feminist societies had been established in many schools and universities, and a quota system had been introduced to remedy the gender imbalance on the school teams competing in the popular television quiz show *Guess Again*.

12. Turning to gender equality in employment, she said that employers were prohibited from discriminating against employees on any grounds. They were also required to work towards full gender equality in the workplace and to increase the proportion of women in positions of power. The equal pay standard and equal pay system certification that had been introduced in recent years was based on international standards and was an unprecedented and pioneering step in the sphere of gender equality. Furthermore, since research had shown that the gender pay gap was reinforced by gender segregation within the labour market, an action plan aimed at putting an end to such gender divisions was being prepared.

13. While much progress had been made in Iceland with regard to gender equality, many challenges still remained. More needed to be done to achieve an even greater balance between men and women in positions of power, secure equality in the labour market, continue gender mainstreaming efforts and eliminate gender-based violence.

14. Her Government strongly supported Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and promoting gender equality was a priority area of development cooperation provided by her Government, with UN-Women as a key partner. Lastly, an international centre for gender research and education had been established at the University of Iceland, which, in 2013, had become part of the United Nations University gender equality studies and training programme.

Articles 1 to 6

15. **Ms. Schulz** said that the State party was to be commended on the important amendments made to the Gender Equality Act; the progress achieved in spite of the deep financial crisis of 2008; the active role played by the country to promote gender equality among the Nordic countries and internationally; and the clear commitment shown to ensuring gender equality in all fields. However, she failed to understand why, some 31 years since it had been ratified, the Convention had still not been fully incorporated into domestic law, preventing it from being used as the basis for legal complaints and from becoming more widely known. She asked whether there were plans to remedy the situation in order to give due recognition to the Convention and provide women with the right to invoke its provisions before the courts and, if so, what time frame had been envisaged for doing so. It would also be interesting to know whether the Government intended to incorporate all human rights treaties to which it was party into its domestic legal framework.

16. She asked whether Iceland, as a member of the European Economic Area, would be implementing Council directives, thereby expanding the scope of its existing anti-discrimination legislation to include all grounds for discrimination and to prohibit discrimination in all fields, such as employment, social protection and access to services.

17. Regarding access to justice, she wondered why, in the eight years since the country's previous periodic report, just three gender equality cases had been adjudicated by the Supreme Court. That, coupled with similarly low number of complaints considered by the Gender Equality Complaints Committee, might be indicative of a broader gender bias within the legal system or a general lack of public awareness about those legal options. An explanation for, and the root causes of, those worryingly low figures should be provided.

18. Lastly, she would appreciate an update on whether there were plans to establish a national human rights institution with a broad mandate that would include gender equality and multiple discrimination issues, in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles).

19. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland) said that the dualist system in Iceland had been discussed with the Committee previously and nothing further could be added. While the Convention was indirectly rather than directly incorporated into the domestic legal system, the Convention itself was fairly widely known. There was a healthy and lively debate on gender equality and women's empowerment in Iceland, particularly among the younger generations who were very active on such issues.

20. **Ms. Erlingsdóttir** (Iceland) said that European Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004, implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and

women in the access to and supply of goods and services, had been brought before the parliament in 2014 and that another four directives would be submitted in spring 2016.

21. The creation of a national human rights institution was under active consideration by the Ministry of Interior, which had been assessing existing organizations with the capacity to assume the role. The Government was not currently in a position to provide a timeline for the establishment of an institution, a process that had been delayed by the recent financial crisis.

22. **Mr. Bruun** said that, although Iceland adopted a dualist approach to international law, it had made exceptions, for example with the European Convention on Human Rights, and that another Nordic country with a dualist system, Norway, had incorporated the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women into domestic law. The incorporation of the Convention by Iceland was therefore not an impossible ideal.

23. Noting that not a single communication had been submitted to the Committee by an Icelandic citizen under the Optional Protocol, he asked what steps had been taken to raise awareness of the remedy among judges and lawyers.

24. **Ms. Schulz** said that she had not heard a reply to her question on access to justice and asked whether, in the delegation's view, the introduction of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation by the Government was likely. Given that both the European Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been incorporated into domestic law, the State party appeared to have created a hierarchy of rights.

25. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland) said that she could not, under any circumstances, accept the suggestion that such a hierarchy had been established. The incorporation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child did not mean that other international treaties would or should be dealt with in the same way. The Committee's comments had been noted and would be passed on to the relevant authorities.

26. **Ms. Erlingsdóttir** (Iceland) said that the Government hoped to enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and to establish a human rights institution with a central office in Reykjavik and branches in some of the larger municipalities. A three-person Gender Equality Complaints Committee had been set up to enhance women's access to justice. It was true, however, that the Committee handled few cases, which showed that a rethink of the system was required.

27. **The Chair** said that she would appreciate clarification on the reasons for the delay in approving a new four-year gender equality action plan, with the previous one having expired at the end of 2014. She invited the delegation to respond to reports that no further gender equality projects were being conceived and that some existing projects lacked sufficient funding. It would be helpful to know the extent to which the new plan would cover the costs of those projects. The delegation should also state whether the Government intended to improve the geographical accessibility of the Centre for Gender Equality, which was located outside Reykjavik, and to expand the range of services that the Centre provided.

28. **Ms. Acosta Vargas**, noting that, in article 2 of the Gender Equality Act, as amended in 2014, special measures had been defined as measures intended to improve the situation of women or to enhance the possibilities of women or men of acquiring gender equality in areas where it was lacking, said that a gender-neutral definition was arguably unnecessary, as such measures did not discriminate against men, and potentially counterproductive. She wished to know whether the Government planned to implement temporary special measures in job sectors where women were underrepresented, such as law enforcement.

29. The delegation should respond to reports that the board of appointment for Supreme Court justices was composed solely of men and had recommended the appointment of a man despite a significant gender imbalance among judges. It should also describe the follow-up given to paragraph 26 of the previous concluding observations, in which the Committee had urged the State party to strengthen its efforts to increase the number of women in high-ranking posts, particularly in academia.

30. Lastly, she asked whether the Government believed that the temporary special measures that it had adopted were effective and whether it had set gender equality objectives in the film, music and other creative industries.

31. **Ms. Erlingsdóttir** (Iceland) said that domestic legislation provided that progressive measures should be taken to improve the position of women in society. A new four-year gender equality action plan had been drafted but had not yet been submitted to the parliament, as the minister responsible for doing so had decided to await the outcome of evaluations of the previous plan and the completion of two studies into gender equality in the labour market. Many of the major projects launched under the previous plan were ongoing and the necessary funding had been secured, but it was true that no additional projects were envisaged.

32. At the Gender Equality Forum held in November 2015, consideration had been given to Norwegian professor Mari Teigen's research into what she called the gender equality paradox, whereby gender-segregated labour markets persisted in Nordic countries despite high labour market participation by both men and women. She argued that one of the underlying factors was an excessive focus on enabling mothers to work rather than on helping both parents to be active in the labour market. The Government hoped to reflect her findings in the new action plan, which would cover the period from 2016 to 2019, and to incorporate other input that had been provided at the Forum.

33. The use of gender-neutral definitions had been debated in the parliament and opposed by several feminist scholars and policymakers. She herself had been critical of such language but felt that it was needed to tackle segregation in the labour market, where temporary special measures had been introduced in favour of men as well as women. Men had, for example, been encouraged to enrol in teacher training courses to address the fact that posts in kindergartens and preschools were held predominantly by women.

34. Most of the temporary special measures implemented by the Government had proved highly effective and the public perception of them had changed markedly as they had begun to bear fruit. In 2010, the Public Limited Companies Act and the Private Limited Companies Act had been amended to include provisions on gender quotas for boards of directors and management. The Government produced an annual report on compliance with the quotas, which it monitored closely and took very seriously.

35. Following the most recent Gender Equality Forum, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science had looked into establishing gender quotas in the film and music industries. As in other Nordic countries, the majority of women film-makers received little or no financial support, but there was a strong political will to rectify the situation.

36. **Ms. Bolladóttir** (Iceland) said that, in late 2015, the Ministry of Interior had requested all police commissioners to draw up an action plan to increase the number of women officers. Police academies were working actively to raise the quality of the education that they provided and to make it more appealing to women, including by

offering a course on gender mainstreaming, which would be taught for the first time in March 2016.

37. Research carried out in 2014 had concluded that there were high rates of discrimination, sexual violence and bullying within the police force. Consequently, an expert panel had been set up to examine cases, a course had been organized to raise awareness of the issue among police chiefs, anti-bullying guidelines had been issued, posters had been put up in police stations, a new code of police ethics had been published on 1 February 2016 and several lectures had been delivered on bullying and effective communication.

38. **Ms. Erlingsdóttir** (Iceland) said that the Minister of the Interior and the head of the Parliamentary General Committee, who were both women lawyers, had stated that the composition of the Supreme Court was unacceptable. A legislative proposal had been formulated stipulating that members of the board of appointment, which currently comprised only men, should appoint an equal number of men and women unless there were objective grounds for not doing so, in which case they should make their reasoning clear. The proposal had been published on the website of the Ministry of the Interior and was open to comments and observations.

39. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that the report was all but silent on the prevalence of gender stereotyping in Icelandic society and on the State party's efforts to eliminate that phenomenon, which made it difficult for the Committee to determine whether article 5 of the Convention was being implemented effectively. She would appreciate additional information on the measures taken by the State party to empower Icelandic women and to remove obstacles to their advancement. She would be interested in hearing more about the nature of the cooperation between civil society and the Government, particularly in respect of the elimination of gender stereotypes. She also wished to know whether civil society was involved in implementing the Committee's concluding observations and in preparing the country's periodic reports and whether the Government planned to increase funding to civil society organizations in the future.

40. **Ms. Hofmeister** said that she would welcome more information on the obstacles preventing the adoption of a new plan to combat domestic and sexual violence; the reasons for the low rate of conviction of perpetrators of acts of sexual violence, including rape; the support services available to rape victims under the age of 18 and to victims living in rural or remote areas of the country; and the police's approach to dealing with rape. She asked whether budgetary resources were allocated to training activities for police officers, prosecutors, judges and other professionals working with the victims of domestic and sexual violence. Noting that the country's only shelter for women was located in Reykjavik and that it was not accessible to women with disabilities, she asked how the State party planned to remedy that situation.

41. **Ms. Leinarte** said she wished to commend the State party on having brought the definition of human trafficking contained in the Criminal Code into line with that of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol), and on having increased the maximum prison term for human trafficking from 8 to 12 years. However, Iceland remained a destination and transit country for human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude and forced marriage, with human traffickers often exploiting the visa-free regime of the Schengen Area to move victims to and from Iceland. Noting that the plan of action to combat human trafficking for the period 2013-2016 was centred on prevention and awareness-raising, she asked whether the plan guaranteed the availability of shelters and adequate support for victims of human trafficking; why the rate of conviction of human traffickers was

so low; and whether more data on victims of trafficking, disaggregated by gender, age and nationality, could be made available to the Committee. She also wished to have details of the findings of the special police research team tasked with examining the issue of organized crime and its connection to prostitution and human trafficking. The Committee had received reports that, despite the State party's efforts to reduce the demand for prostitution and the prevalence of human trafficking by criminalizing the purchase of sex, there had been an increase in prostitution in 2015. She would be grateful if the delegation could comment on those reports and on the overall effectiveness of the so-called Swedish model for dealing with prostitution, whereby only the purchase but not the sale of sex was criminalized. Lastly, she asked whether it was common practice for the Icelandic courts to preserve the anonymity of individuals convicted of having purchased sex.

42. **Ms. Bolladóttir** (Iceland) said that the Government had adopted a more holistic approach to combating violence and now placed a greater emphasis on education and awareness-raising activities. The outcome of consultations held with various professionals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would form the basis of a new four-year plan to combat violence. The Government had also canvassed the opinion of young people and minority groups, such as immigrants, to ensure that the plan was tailored as closely as possible to the needs of all segments of Icelandic society.

43. In 2010, the Ministry of the Interior had initiated a consultation process to discuss the issue of sexual violence and the judiciary's handling of rape cases. As part of that process, several meetings had taken place with members of the judiciary, which had led to the commissioning of a special research team to draft a series of reports on the judiciary's current approach to dealing with that crime. The reports had revealed that many women were reluctant to report rape and to press charges against the perpetrator; that investigations were not always conducted efficiently; and that the relevant laws were often difficult to apply in practice owing to the requirement of proof. There was also a need to provide police officers working with rape victims with additional training and to assign victims legal counsel sooner. The Ministry of the Interior had set up a working group to examine all the proposals and recommendations contained in the reports with a view to improving the procedures for handling such cases. Previously, the Directorate of Public Prosecutions had been the sole authority competent to deal with cases involving sexual violence. Once it had dismissed a case, the case in question could not be referred to a second authority for re-examination. That problem had been obviated by establishing a second national prosecution authority. The Directorate could now hear appeals against decisions to drop a case. It was hoped that such a step would lead to an increase in convictions for sexual violence.

44. While it was true that there was only one shelter for women in the country, the adoption of the "Austrian model", whereby the police had been granted the authority to impose exclusion orders on and to remove suspected perpetrators of domestic violence from the family home, would reduce the need for such shelters. Furthermore, given that the population was concentrated around the capital and in the north of the country, it would not be logical or practical to construct shelters in rural areas, especially since the perpetrator of the abuse would continue to live in close proximity to the victim. The services available to victims of sexual abuse included emergency care units and specially trained psychologists who could also treat women who had suffered sexual abuse in the past. The Government also provided funding to NGOs assisting female victims of violence. Two short films illustrating the procedures for dealing with cases of sexual violence involving children had also been made.

45. Despite the Criminal Code having been amended in 2009 to criminalize the purchase of sex, very few cases had been brought before the courts. It was not common practice for the Icelandic courts to preserve the anonymity of an individual convicted of having purchased sex. The ruling handed down by the judge in the case cited by the Committee had attracted considerable criticism and was not the norm. In 2010, nine individuals had been convicted of having purchased sex while two had been acquitted. Profiting from prostitution remained illegal and could carry a prison sentence. Since 2015, 37 cases of human trafficking had been reported to the Icelandic authorities, 3 of which had been brought before the courts, resulting in 1 conviction. The massive growth in the Icelandic tourism industry was the likely cause of the increased prevalence of prostitution in the country. Between 2011 and 2014, the authorities had identified 30 women known to be prostitutes, half of whom were foreign nationals. In Iceland, the general consensus was that the Swedish model for dealing with prostitution was the most effective.

46. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland) said that the Swedish model for dealing with prostitution had been effective, as it had reduced the overall demand for such sex services. In cooperation with the Icelandic Red Cross, the Government planned to set up a helpline and to improve support services for victims of human trafficking; to provide special training on dealing with victims to professionals working in the criminal justice system; to raise public awareness of human trafficking; and to review the police guidelines on dealing with that phenomenon. There were also plans to hold a round table on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, to which all relevant stakeholders would be invited. Traditionally, the Government met with representatives of civil society and NGOs prior to each session of the Commission on the Status of Women and ensured that they were represented on the Icelandic panel.

47. **Ms. Erlingsdóttir** (Iceland) said that the onset of the global financial crisis had led the Government to cut funding to women's organizations but that the funding had since been restored. The Government had funded the participation of such organizations in the 2014 Nordiskt Forum in Malmö. The Gender Equality Council provided a forum in which the Government could collaborate with NGOs. The Council was made up of 11 members, 10 of whom were nominated by the social partners, including women's and civil society organizations. The members of the Council provided input into the Government's various gender programmes and helped with the preparations for the country's biennial gender equality forum.

48. The Government continued to view the high prevalence of gender stereotypes in Icelandic society as a cause for concern. A survey had shown that young people in the 8 to 16 age group held the most conservative and negative views on the role of women in society. However, there was also evidence to suggest that those attitudes could change over time with exposure to information campaigns. The gender equality expert attached to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture had overseen the preparation of a special curriculum intended to promote gender equality, which was to be taught in every school in Iceland. The Government was aware that, if left unchecked, negative stereotypes could lead to gender-based violence and hate speech and so was working with the Icelandic media to curb that phenomenon. Furthermore, research conducted by the Government suggested that the increased involvement of men in child-rearing and domestic tasks was essential for securing women's advancement in society.

49. **Ms. Hofmeister** said that it would be helpful to have additional information on the steps taken by the police to enforce the legislation to combat domestic violence.

50. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that clarification was needed on the impact of the "Keeping the Window Open" project on female victims of domestic violence. Had the

project encouraged more women who had suffered domestic violence to come forward? Were there linkages between that project and the Exclusion Orders and Ejections Act, No. 85/2011, which gave the police the power to impose residence exclusion orders on and to remove suspected perpetrators of domestic violence from the family home? Had the Government faced a backlash from men who felt that there was potential for the abuse of that power?

51. **Ms. Bolladóttir** (Iceland) said that, in recent years, a number of changes had been made in the way domestic violence was dealt with in Iceland. Those changes had been prompted by the findings of a study conducted by the Ministry of Welfare starting in 2008, which had revealed that a staggering 42 per cent of women in Iceland over the age of 16 had been subjected to some form of domestic violence. Among the changes that had had the most significant impact was the replacement of the Restraining Order Act, No. 122/2008, with the Exclusion Orders and Ejections Act. Whereas the older legislation had required restraining orders to be processed through the courts, which could take up to three days, the new legislation authorized the police to remove the alleged offender from the victim's residence. However, the police were required to have first exhausted all other less coercive measures; when they did apply residence exclusion and eviction measures, they had to obtain court confirmation of those measures within three days. No criticism had been levelled against the police for misusing their prerogative; however, the courts had received some criticism for what was perceived to be their reluctance to confirm certain of the protective measures initiated by the police.

52. The "Keeping the Window Open" pilot project, which involved the local police and social services, had been introduced in the Sudurnes region because it had registered a higher than average rate of domestic violence. The aims of the project had been to improve the first-response capability of the police, register domestic violence cases as such, and in so doing improve the accuracy of statistics on domestic violence, and bring public attention to the problem. The project had won a prize for innovation in public administration, achieving its results without resorting to any additional funding or staff, relying instead on improving cooperation between the police and social services, adapting working methods, changing attitudes and providing follow-up support to the parties involved. That had resulted in more cases being reported, more perpetrators being brought to justice and more convictions being handed down. The same method had been adopted by the Metropolitan Police.

53. In conjunction with the project, a variety of public information and awareness-raising activities on domestic violence had been organized, including professional workshops for police and social services staff, public town halls, booklets for new parents and the publication of an information brochure in Icelandic, English and Polish that had been distributed to all households in the area covered by the project. The brochure provided definitions of various types of domestic violence, highlighted relevant legal provisions and provided contact information for institutions offering assistance to victims. Consideration was currently being given to disseminating the brochure at the national level. In addition, the National Police Commissioner had issued new police procedures for domestic violence cases, adopted a new risk assessment tool and set up a treatment programme for male perpetrators. The programme would soon begin offering similar treatment for female perpetrators. In 2015, 700 interviews had been conducted as part of the programme.

54. Owing to its success, the multidisciplinary approach to domestic violence was being considered for adoption throughout the country. In furtherance of that objective, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing had established a team on domestic violence that travelled around the country to provide education, exchange experiences and promote the multidisciplinary approach.

Articles 7 to 9

55. **Ms. Hofmeister** said that the main goal of the Convention was for States parties to achieve de facto equality between men and women and to create a reality that was free from stereotypes. To achieve such equality, parity between women and men in all positions of public and political life should be the final step of gender equality advancement in Iceland. Women were extremely underrepresented in the judiciary and among the police, and only 25 per cent of diplomats and district commissioners were women. She asked what steps the Government envisaged taking in order to achieve such equality as rapidly as possible. She would appreciate additional information concerning the relationship between the advancement of women on the one hand and gender-responsive budgeting and gender mainstreaming on the other. She wished to know what results women had obtained in the most recent local and national elections.

56. **Ms. Erlingsdóttir** (Iceland) said that women in Iceland were approaching the achievement of gender parity in both national and local political decision-making bodies. Their representation in the parliament currently stood at 44 per cent; in local government it stood at nearly 42 per cent. Regrettably, only 30 per cent of the directors of government agencies were women, and that was admittedly an area in which greater efforts were needed.

57. Improving women's representation in local government had been more difficult to achieve in the areas outside the capital and the Sudurnes region. Research carried out prior to the 2014 election showed that not only were there fewer women than men on candidate lists in rural areas, but women tended to serve on municipal councils for no more than one term. In their responses, women had indicated that they found it difficult to combine political work with the traditional gender roles that prevailed in rural societies, where husbands often worked far away from home in construction or fishing and women attended to home and family. Another factor was that both women and men who served on municipal councils in rural areas were poorly paid. It was important for women to continue increasing their representation in public decision-making positions in order for such representation to be perceived as normal.

58. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland) said that diplomats in the Icelandic Foreign Service were divided into four categories. In order of the highest to the lowest categories, women accounted for 29 per cent of all ambassadors, 8 per cent of all minister counsellors, 41 per cent of all counsellors and 52 per cent of all secretaries. The statistics on gender equality for the category of ambassador had improved slightly in relation to previous years, given that some male ambassadors had retired and some female ambassadors had taken their places. The figure for the minister counsellor category, which reflected the greatest imbalance, might be explained by the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had for many years not applied the formal procedure of calling for candidates. The figure for the counsellor category was a reflection of the fact that, starting in 2016, the Icelandic International Development Agency had been merged with the Icelandic Foreign Service, which had had the effect of worsening the gender balance, as the majority of the Agency's employees were male and possessed the rank of counsellor. The figures for the lowest category, that of secretary, were somewhat skewed in that the Government had stopped hiring public officials for that category for the past several years. Despite the progress made in women's representation in public decision-making positions, there was still much work to be done in that regard. Nevertheless, there was strong political will for continuing to strive towards gender balance in the future.

Articles 10 to 14

59. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she welcomed the inclusion of gender equality as a compulsory component of national academic curricula. Regrettably, however, gender segregation appeared to remain a problem in the labour market and in the educational choices of female students, who still tended to choose traditionally female professions. There also appeared to be a lack of progress in sports, where female students were underrepresented in school sporting activities, and their overall advancement in sports seemed to be limited. In addition, textbooks still needed to be changed and curricula amended in order to reflect women's place in history. She would appreciate knowing what plans and strategies the Government had developed in order to address those gaps.

60. **Mr. Bruun** commended the State party for the socially balanced and gender-sensitive approach it had taken to confronting its national banking and financial crisis. He nevertheless had a number of concerns regarding the relatively high gender pay gap in Iceland and the prevalence of part-time work among women. He asked whether any study had been conducted to determine to what extent such part-time work was voluntary and what impact it had on pension and social security schemes.

61. Although he welcomed the recent amendment of the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women, article 19 of the Act still contained an important qualification, in that it provided that women and men who worked for the same employer were to be paid equal wages and enjoy equal terms of employment for the same job or jobs of equal value. The Convention did not recognize such a condition as having the "same employer". In fact, an employer who hired only women for certain tasks and paid them lower wages than the applicable standard, even if he or she had not hired any men to perform the same job, could be accused of discrimination. The issuance of equal pay certificates, as a means of combating wage inequality, appeared to be subject to the "same employer" proviso as well. Such a restriction was particularly problematic, as the Icelandic labour market was distinguished by a high level of both horizontal and vertical gender segregation. He urged the State party to reconsider the methods it used to close the gender pay gap and asked what plans it had to delete the offending restriction in article 19 of the Act so as to fulfil its obligations under the Convention.

62. While he commended the State party for awarding fathers one of the most generous amounts of parental leave in the world, he was nevertheless concerned about the long-term sustainability of that benefit, owing to budget constraints and about the apparent difficulties women faced in obtaining childcare for children between the ages of 9 and 24 months. He asked what measures the Government planned to take in order to address those problems.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.